

PRIVATE PILOT

Adventures
Of An FBO

BAHAMAS
WEEKEND

Antiques
At Ottumwa

PLANE TEST: MAULE ROCKET
Cubs With A Difference
DOCTORS ON THE WING



A New Paradise For Pilots:
A PIPER TO BAJA

All in a day's work



California's picturesque Channel Islands, the best known of which are Santa Catalina and Santa Cruz, lie parallel to the coast off Los Angeles and within easy view on a clear day. There are three ways to get to them.

If you are after headlines, and are in good shape, you can swim. If you are after weekend or vacation recreation, you may elect to take a boat instead. But if you are after trophy sheep, goats or boar, chances are you'll fly.

That's how PRIVATE PILOT met Jack Valenti, owner-operator of Murray Aviation on the Ventura County Airport at Oxnard. With a company hunting party seeking to get away from it all for a little hunting, arrangements were made to fly out to Santa Cruz. Valenti regularly ferries hunters to the privately-owned island, in both single and twin engined Cessnas. French rams and Russian boar may be taken from early January through June on Santa Cruz, and Spanish goats are hunted on Santa Catalina.

An 8000-hour pilot who has been flying the Channel Islands for eight years, Valenti has done what a good many private pilots dream of doing but never manage: he makes a living doing what he likes to do, which is fly. He has done nothing but fly, in fact, for the past 12 years, since entering Air Force cadet train-

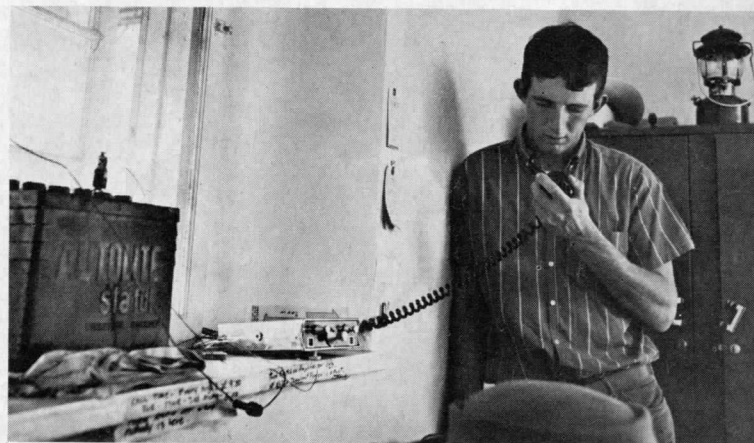
AN EX-FIGHTER JOCKEY RUNS THIS ISLAND-HOPPING FERRY SERVICE FOR HUNTERS ON THE WING!

By Martin Haynes

Jack Valenti drags the grass runway on Santa Cruz to shoo away wildlife. Right, the Cessna 310 parked in front of its home base.



Valenti checks wind with guide Don Capelli, below, manning a battery-powered transceiver on Santa Cruz, where landing is by permission only.



ing in 1954 after a year as an enlisted airman. He took basic training at Malden, Missouri, in AT-6 Texans, then trained on T-28's and T-33 jets, and later flew F-89 Scorpion jets in Georgia and at Ladd AFB, Alaska.

Flying branched out for Jack Valenti in Alaska. In borrowed or rented lightplanes, mostly Luscombes and Taylorcrafts, he got an introduction to bush piloting. "I flew on wheels and skis, but not on floats," he says with a grin. "I can't swim."

He did a lot of bear and moose hunting, which involved flying into the back country and landing on river sandbars or rocky beaches. And there was variety, too. "I carried a whole Eskimo dog team in a Navion once," he recalls. "That was an experience."

"Flying on skis was something new, too. You don't

have any brakes, of course. And getting started can be a problem if the skis are frozen to the ground. You have to rev up the engine, then open the door and stick one foot out to push. One side comes loose while the other is stuck, you spin around, break loose, accelerate and discover you're going in the wrong direction, all at the same time. It keeps the flying interesting."

Valenti, at 32 already a veteran instrument-rated commercial pilot, left the Air Force in 1958 and went to work for Murray Aviation. He bought the business in 1962 and commenced selling Cessnas and flying charters. He flies an average of 30 trips a month to Santa Cruz, where the owners do not permit private planes to land without prior permission. "I like to go across above 6000 in single engined ships, high enough to glide to shore from any point in the crossing," he

The runway at Santa Cruz qualifies fully as an unimproved strip, and it takes more than a Sunday pilot to fly to or from it with safety.



Valenti's pilots use this Cessna 172 as a maid-of-all-work, hauling food and supplies to the island and meat or trophy heads from successful hunts back to Oxnard.

says. "Remember, I can't swim. In the twins we go across at 2500 to 3000. All of our crossings, both ways, are on Oxnard approach control radar, which is comforting."

Island flying is not for students or low-time pilots, Valenti says. Wind, weather and water keep even the veterans on their toes in an area where fog can blanket an island with deceptive speed and winds of 60 to 70 mph can come up in an hour or two.

"Once I went to Santa Cruz in a 310 to rescue some people who had been shipwrecked. When I landed on the island and was sitting still with the engines idling, indicated airspeed was 65-70 and the stall warning horn honked intermittently," Valenti recalled.

The Santa Cruz strip is on a hill, with the upper end in a steep, narrow canyon. If you come in over the

beach to land uphill and mess up the approach, there's no going around. Valenti believes pilots flying to the islands really should be instrument rated, because of fog and wind. "And quite aside from the fact that it's my business," he says, "I'd advise pilots on their first trip to have an experienced pilot take them in and show them the ropes. It would pay, and I don't mean me."

The humdrum life of ferrying hunters back and forth is broken occasionally by such events as the sinking of the ship Chickasaw on the south side of Santa Rosa Island in 1962. Valenti took a Cessna 172 onto a nearby beach at low tide to deliver salvage and rescue crews. The beach disappeared at high tide, and there was something of a race to get the people out ahead of the advancing water.

Hunters depart at dawn from ranch house, portions of which are known to be in excess of 100 years old.



Samuel Bolling Wright III, who is Butch to his friends, prepares to take a guide, a fishing pole and a load of dressed meat back to the mainland in the workhorse 172.

On another trip, this time to Santa Cruz, Valenti spied a plane on the beach at Smugglers Cove. The plane had landed without permission, and when spotted was sitting with the tail in the rocks and the landing gear in the water, with the tide coming in.

"There were two guys and a girl in a bikini, and they were in bad trouble, but all they did was wave," Valenti recalls. "I made two low passes, one to look over the bikini and the other to check what was left of the beach. Then I landed on top of the hill nearby and walked down to them. We pushed the plane to the only strip of beach left above water and I flew it off and landed it beside mine, on the hill. Another five minutes and there wouldn't have been any beach to take off on. Water and waves would have ruined that plane in no time."

Trouble has touched Valenti's own flying only lightly, but one December night in 1959 it brushed him, and left prominent Cessna-seller Valenti with good words to say about the fast action of the retractable landing gear on a Piper Commanche 250. He was on a charter flight from Paso Robles to Oxnard long after dark when the engine-driven fuel pump failed east of Santa Barbara.

"I assured the passenger that everything was okay and flipped on the electric auxiliary pump. We were at 7500 feet and there were no lighted runways near, so I headed for Oxnard." But at this point the auxiliary fuel pump stopped when a short in the navigation lights kicked out a circuit breaker which also carried the radio landing lights and auxiliary fuel pump. This arrangement has long since been corrected, but on that night it left Valenti reaching under the panel to push the breaker back in. Each time he did the nav light short kicked it back out again.

"I have spots picked out all over this area," Valenti explained, "but I had no choice here, as I had no landing lights, and we were getting down low. I headed a little offshore to avoid any hills, and planned a water landing. I kept pushing the breaker in and the engine kept sputtering. Finally one landing light came on just as we were ready to belly into the water a few yards off the beach.

"I could see a glimpse of sand in the corner of my eye, but we were so low I was afraid to put a wing down in a bank. So I put the gear down, hit the rudder and skidded over the beach. That gear popped down mighty fast, and we put her on the beach just north of Ventura."

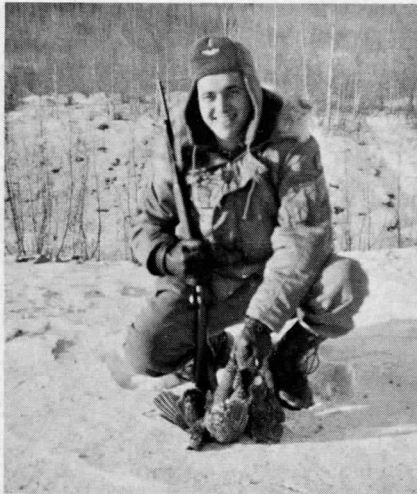
The next day Valenti wired the auxiliary fuel pump directly to the battery and flew the plane back to Oxnard for repair. He had landed at high tide, and at high tide the beach measured 600 feet.

Short takeoffs, however, are nothing new to Valenti. Alaskan sandbars are not known for their length, and even a California fixed base operator sometimes has to get out of a tight spot. In early 1965 a faulty gas gauge resulted in an emergency landing by one of

In his younger days jet jockey Valenti, right, poses on the wing of his F-89D Scorpion with radar operator Jim Farha. Valenti flew fighters for Air Force in Alaska.



Island-hopping, beach landings, movie flying and city street takeoffs spice the life of this busy FBO



His Alaskan tour gave Valenti good training in bush flying to reach hunting areas in the rough country.



Valenti confesses he learned to love the P-51 Mustang during 15 hours of flight time he logged in one while filming a television picture about the war in Europe.

Valenti's instructor pilots, on a street in the community of Oxnard Shores. The plane was fueled and pushed to another street 200 feet long, with a four foot fence across the end. Valenti flew it out, clearing the fence with room to spare.

More recently, Valenti got FAA and local government sanction to land a Cessna 150 on a city street in Oxnard for a static display. Early one morning, while police blocked traffic, he slipped over one set of power lines 88 feet high, under another set some 30 feet high, and put down on Commercial Avenue in downtown Oxnard. A traffic officer said the plane was stopped 70 feet from point of touchdown. Valenti then taxied two blocks to the display site outside a store building. Takeoff when the display is ended doesn't

worry him: he'll have police traffic control again, and there are 800 feet of Commercial Avenue available for takeoff.

A little young for World War II, Valenti nevertheless managed to absorb some of the romance of the era by flying a P-51 Mustang in a TV film about fighter pilots in Europe. "I loved the Mustang," he recalls. "When the pilot film was made I got about 15 hours in one, and I loved every minute of it." Valenti and another pilot took turns doing the live aerial scenes, for which two privately-owned Mustangs were painted with their 8th Air Force markings.

"Naturally the cameras wouldn't pick up anything if we stayed high," grinned Valenti, "so there was a good bit of hedge-hopping. I got to give the Santa

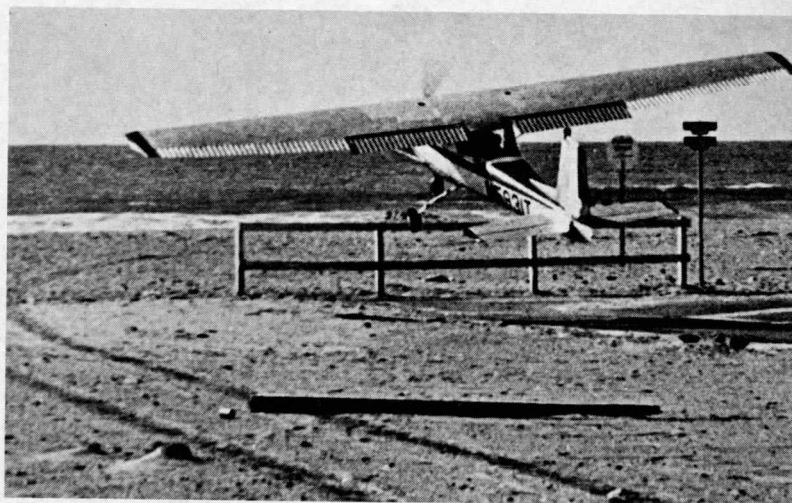
After a city-street landing Valenti gets police escort to the store in front of which the Cessna 150 is to be tied down for display. Takeoff will be from same street.



With full flaps, Valenti brings the 150 in for landing on Commercial Avenue in Oxnard. He was stopped within 70 feet of touchdown, according to one police officer.



Valenti casts a careful eye over a Cessna 210 stolen from his ramp by a youth with only four hours total time and flown to miraculous safe landing in Mexico.



This street in Oxnard Shores is just 200 feet long but it was used by Valenti for successful takeoff after a fuel gauge malfunction caused a forced landing nearby.

Clara river bed a couple of pretty good buzz jobs."

That kind of thing is reserved for the movies, however, and Valenti is a stickler for conservative flying practices. That is why he discourages pilots without experience in channel flying visiting the island for the first time without an instructor-pilot along.

Valenti's ferry operation for hunters has developed into something of a major airlift in recent years, and he has booked flights to Santa Cruz through June, 1967 for hunters with reservations already made. And the hunter success rate being what it is on the island, there is always the problem of hauling back trophies as well as satisfied hunters.

Ventura County Airport lies about two miles inland from the coast midway between Los Angeles and Santa

Barbara, just 50 statute miles out on the 277° radial of the Los Angeles VOR. Hunters, or tourists who just want to have a look at the islands, can drive or fly to the airport in their own planes, then climb into a Cessna 310 and make the round trip for \$20 each. "If you take the boat it is still \$20 a head," explained Valenti, "but it takes two and a half hours, and you still have 10 miles to drive to the lodge when you get to the island."

If this sounds like a sales pitch, it is easy to forgive Valenti, whose enthusiasm for flying is about as inconspicuous as three engines on a Piper Cub. He likes to fly, and the more passengers he drums up, the more chance he gets to do it. He is a man who is, unmistakably, happy with his work. ✈